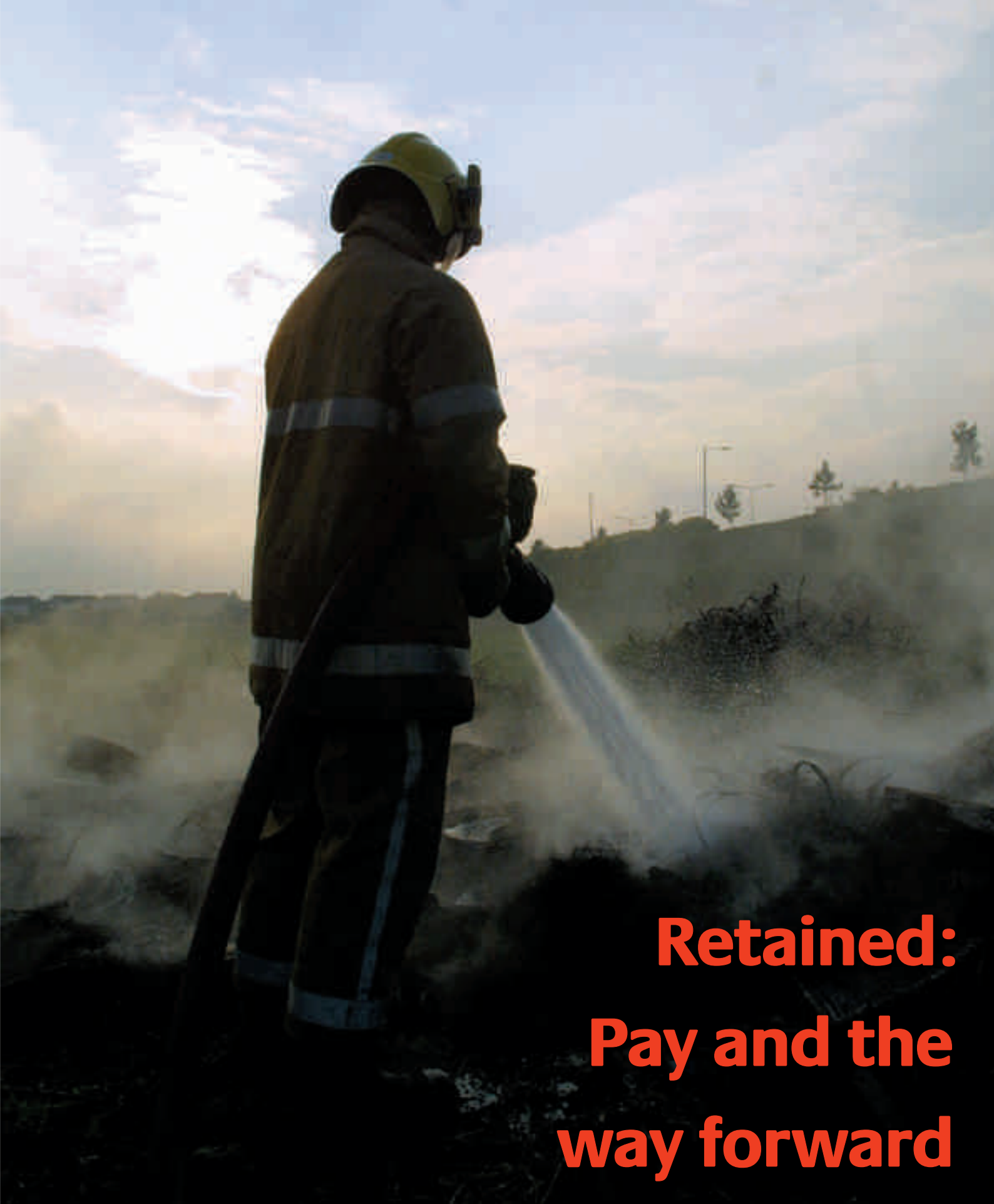




Volume 32 No. 4 May 2004

# FIRE FIGHTER



**Retained:  
Pay and the  
way forward**

## EDITORIAL

# Setting the Agenda



SO here we are again, at Annual Conference – this time after a gap of two very long and momentous years.

There will be much to debate and discuss. We must also be looking to the future, as well as looking back on the recent past and present. As I write, the key policy objective laid down by conference – the demand for fair and professional pay – is still a cause of concern. By the time you read these words, we will all know to what extent.

What I can say for sure now is that as we arrive at Bridlington in many ways it will be as a Union that has grown in strength and maturity.

We have been tested – each member, brigade, region, and at head office in Kingston – more than any time since 1977, when the FBU was engaged in the last national strike.

We have learned to look again at our own organisation. This means branches

must be much more active in co-operating and exchanging information to ensure bad employers do not disregard FBU members and the public interest.

We have also developed and refined our own agenda for the Fire and Rescue Service of the future. That agenda is summed up in our demand for a central target of Zero Fire Deaths and will be detailed as we roll out our NO<sub>2</sub> Fire Deaths campaign.

On April 27, we took our campaign to the Houses of Commons in an event hosted by Michael Clapham, Labour MP and chair of the All Party Fire Safety Group, and to which MPs from all parties were invited.

We explained why Zero Fire Deaths should be the key driving target in the Fire and Rescue Service of the future.

And to underline the FBU's commitment to drastically drive down fire deaths, we announced that the Union would be

donating £10,000 to a new initiative to develop more effective smoke and heat alarms.

For we know from everyday practice that a person's chance of survival in a fire increases as the time between the start of the fire and the first emergency 999 call is reduced.

And we know that smoke and heat alarms are critical in reducing this time and so increase a person's chance of survival. The Pathfinder trials confirm this.

But, the smoke detectors fitted in most homes today – usually located in one point and operated solely by short-life batteries – often fail to detect fires or alert people in time. What is much more effective is a multi-point smoke and heat detection system.

Such a system has detectors in all parts of the building communicating with each other.

So when a detector in one part of



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a building discovers a fire situation, all alarms in the building sound. This system reduces the time between the discovery of a fire and alerting occupants in other parts of the building. It increases the chance of escape and it reduces the time between the start of the fire and the opportunity to summon help from firefighters and emergency fire control staff when a rescue is needed.

The upshot will not only lead to a big difference to fire deaths. It will particularly benefit poorer households who tend to be more at risk, thus meeting Government objectives of greater social inclusion.

This initiative is the kind of pragmatic approach the UK Fire & Rescue Service needs to take if it is to deliver real improvements on the ground. Yet it is just one element in the Union's NO<sub>2</sub> Fire

Despite the stresses and strains we have undergone since we launched the Pay Campaign two years ago, the FBU is stronger than ever. We are developing our own agenda for the Fire and Rescue Service

But such systems have been both disruptive and cost-prohibitive as they require detectors to be linked by cables to both the mains power supply and to each other. With the advent of wireless technology there is now the opportunity for such a crucial system for residential buildings to be developed.

In the future families, the elderly and children, could rest easier in their sleep thanks to these new systems – battery-operated and mains powered, multi-point wireless signal interlinked domestic smoke and heat alarms. The technology is already available for commercial use. Unfortunately, it is too expensive for most households.

We expect the Government and Fire Authorities to respond positively to our challenge.

Deaths strategy that will be detailed in the National IRMP document the Union will be launching publicly at Tenby later in the month.

I'm proud to say that the FBU, despite (or perhaps because of) all the stresses and strains it has undergone since we launched the Pay Campaign two years ago, is stronger than ever – with a clear-sightedness lacking among so many Employers and policymakers in the UK Fire and Rescue Service.

**Andy Gilchrist**

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Cover picture: Mark Pinder/  
reportdigital.co.uk



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## NEWS IN BRIEF

### FIGHTING FAR RIGHT IN JUNE

Hundreds of trade unionists pledged to step up their campaigning against racist and fascist candidates standing in the Local, European and London Assembly elections in June, at rallies in Birmingham and London the weekend of 3-4 April.

The urgent need for increased anti racist campaigning against far right parties ahead of the Thursday 10 June polls was highlighted by speakers at the rallies, which were held in the heart of two of the largest black communities in Britain.

The rallies reflected the broad alliance against the far right and speakers included: Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the TUC; Billy Hayes, General Secretary of the Communication Workers' Union; Maria-Helena Andre of the European Trade Union Confederation; Gloria Mills of Unison and the TUC General Council; Claude Moraes MEP; Sabby Dhalu, Unite Against Fascism; Steve Silver, Searchlight; and Lee Jasper, Greater London Authority.

The rallies not only called for action, but following the London rally some 30 trade unionists and community activists joined the newly formed Enfield Unite Against Fascism campaign, leafletting locally on Sunday.

At the rallies, the TUC launched a new handbook to help activists organise local campaigns against far-right parties. The handbook describes how to defend communities against racism and fascism; it gives strategic advice to

activists; and it provides important legal advice.

[www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk)

### RISE IN RACE HATE CRIMES

The number of race hate crimes received by Prosecutors from the police jumped 12% to nearly 4,200 last year, according to figures from the Crown Prosecution Service.

Eighteen cases of religiously aggravated crimes were also prosecuted in England and Wales, the first time figures have been published on this type of hate crime. Islam was the "actual or perceived" religion of the victim in 10 out of the 18 cases. In six of these, the accused was also Muslim.

The increase in race cases received by the CPS in 2002-03 followed a 20% jump the previous year. Of the 4,192 received, prosecutions were brought against 3,116 defendants, 442 more than in 2001-02. Seven out of 10 of the charges resulted in guilty pleas and 15% in convictions after a trial. The conviction rate of 85% was up on the previous year.

The CPS pledged to tackle race crimes more vigorously after a report by its independent inspectorate in May 2002 found that Prosecutors were wrongly reducing charges in more than one in four racist incidents. Charges of racially aggravated crimes were regularly downgraded to remove the race element, while in other cases Prosecutors accepted defendants' guilty pleas to the crime minus the racial aggravation.

Of the 18 religiously motivated cases finalised between December 2001 – when this type of offence was created – and the end of March last year, there were eight convictions and seven ended with acquittals, defendants bound over to keep the peace, or discontinuances by the CPS.

Two more cases resulted in convictions for the basic crime without the religiously aggravated element and there was one case in which the Judge ruled that there was insufficient evidence.

[www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

### NEW BENEFITS GUIDE

The introduction of tax credits for parents, workers without children, disabled employees and now for pensioners means that more people are entitled to financial support from the Government.

This makes it all the more important that union reps understand the new system and can answer members' questions to help ensure that they and their families claim what they are entitled to.

The Pension Credit, introduced last October, provides guaranteed minimum levels of income for those over 60 of £105.45 a week for a single person and £160.95 for a couple. Greater numbers of pensioners will now benefit, as there are also payments available for those over 65 who have some savings and who would not qualify for the guaranteed minimum rates.

The Child Tax Credit,

introduced last April, is being extended this year to non-working parents who are claiming benefits, so providing a single system of support for children. Almost six million families are receiving the tax credits, or equivalent support through benefits and 200,000 families without children are claiming Working Tax Credit.

The LRD guide, State Benefits & Tax Credits 2004, gives the new rates for the tax credits, explains who is eligible and how to apply. It also describes the complete range of state benefits: universal, contribution-based and means-tested, giving the new rates effective from 12 April 2004.

[www.lrd.org.uk](http://www.lrd.org.uk)

### WORKPLACE BULLYING

Trade and Industry Secretary Patricia Hewitt has announced the world's largest project to stamp out bullying and discrimination at work.

The trade union Amicus will lead the project, worth £1.8 million and will work with some of Britain's biggest employers to develop practical guidance to help all employers tackle bullying. Half the project's funding – almost £1 million – will come from the DTI's Strategic Partnership Fund, which helps strengthen employer-employee relationships and improve business performance. It is believed to be the largest study ever, anywhere in the world, of discrimination at work.

The project will provide support, advice and training to organisations trying to deal with bullying by:

- training employees as



counsellors and investigators of bullying and harassment

- devising and promoting a voluntary charter on dignity at work
- promoting examples of excellent employers in the UK and lessons to learn
- producing a benchmarking tool enabling organisations to measure their success in achieving dignity
- producing a "ban bullying pack".

The project has 10 partners including British Aerospace, Royal Mail, Legal and General, British Telecom and Remploy, and will be supported by Government agencies such as the arbitration and conciliation service ACAS and the Health and Safety Executive.

The promotion of dignity at work can have several business benefits, including:

- time spent on promotion of dignity at work is more productive than time spent on dealing with complaints of bullying and/or harassment
- getting rid of discrimination can reduce the number of grievance cases and the time and money dedicated to processing them
- employers can make productivity improvements through improved morale along with reduced sick leave and absenteeism.

[www.lrd.org.uk](http://www.lrd.org.uk)  
[www.dti.gov.uk](http://www.dti.gov.uk)

## 2004 BUDGET

THE TUC broadly welcomed Chancellor Gordon Brown's 2004 budget. The key points were:

- tax increases to meet his public spending plans firmly rejected

● overall economy is forecast to grow strongly by over 3 per cent in both 2004 and 2005

● borrowing is projected to fall rapidly through 2008, although large sums going into investment in the public infrastructure

● the underlying state of the public finances remains strong.

● overall increase in total public spending to slow

● increase in education spending, transport, defence and homeland security and cuts in civil service jobs.

● Government seeking efficiency savings of £20 billion per annum by 2007-2008 with all Government departments having to cut budgets by at least 5 per cent by 2008.

● one-off extra £100 to all pensioners over 70 on top of the winter-fuel payments to help cope with recent council tax rises.

● increase in the Child Tax Credit of £3.50 a week. As a result families with children will be £175 a year better off in real terms, and those in the poorest fifth of the population will be £425 a year better off.

● promise to create 1700 children's centres around the country, with increased spending on early years education and childcare to increase by £669 million by 2008.

● Government to consult on phasing out payment via employers of Working Tax Credit, which would mean an end to workers relying on employers for their wages and their benefits and should reduce the likelihood of the WTC being used to subsidise low pay.

● however, the tax credit

income thresholds have been frozen, meaning workers who receive a pay rise in line with inflation will see their net incomes increase by less than inflation. Also, the maximum eligible costs for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit have been frozen at £135 per week for one child and £200 for two.

● other welfare reforms designed to increase the number of people moving off benefits and into employment include new premiums for people looking for work. These are similar to the Labour Market Benefit, first demanded by the TUC more than ten years ago

● the National Minimum Wage will increase from 1 October 2004 to £4.85 for adults and £4.10 for workers aged 18-21, plus 16 and 17 year olds will be protected for the first time with a minimum wage commencing at £3.00 per hour. The TUC calculates that this latter measure will deliver a pay rise to 50,000 16 and 17 year olds.

[www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk)

## TOLPUDDLE FESTIVAL 2004

This year's Tolpuddle Festival, organised by the South West TUC, is being held between Friday 16 July – Sunday 18 July. The Festival begins on Friday evening with a ceilidh and continues on the Saturday with trade union workshops, international solidarity events and music throughout the evening and night.

Sunday is regarded as the "main event" with a full day of speakers and musicians followed by a parade of



**FBU General Secretary Andy Gilchrist speaking at the last Tolpuddle Festival**

banners through the village. Stalls and refreshment tents, (including the workers beer tent), will be open throughout the entire Festival where trade unionists can exchange ideas and experiences, meet with groups such as Amnesty International and Cuba Solidarity, and of course keep thirst at bay with a small refreshment or two!

On the bill this year are Billy Bragg, Tony Benn, Brendan Barber and many more. On site camping is available by prior booking at £20 per pitch and parking is at £3 per car or £10 per coach, (proceeds shared between the village churches and the TUC Tolpuddle Martyrs Trust). The Tolpuddle Festival is a hugely enjoyable experience for all trade unionists and their families and the SW FBU would encourage all members and officials who can to come along, remember the martyrs and join in the fun.

**Tam McFarlane, Regional Secretary, Region 14**

For further information contact the SW FBU Regional Office, the SW TUC or visit: [www.tuc.org.uk/tolpuddle](http://www.tuc.org.uk/tolpuddle)

# HEALTH AND SAFETY

## HSC'S BIG NEW PLAN BRANDED 'COST CUTTING'

It is billed by the Government as a "radical new strategy" to improve future safety standards in Great Britain, has been criticised as resource "rationing" in *The Lancet* and had been rubbished in advance by HSE Inspectors' Union Prospect, as a cost-cutting deregulation agenda.

One thing seems certain – HSC's big new plan will be contentious.

Launching the new strategy for Workplace Health and Safety in Great Britain to 2010 and beyond, which was the subject of a quickie consultation late last year, Safety Minister Des Browne and HSC Chair Bill Callaghan said it was "ambitious, but realistic, focusing on managing risks and not eliminating them."

Des Browne said: "This new strategy is radical and brave in its approach to reduce workplace risks for everyone, no matter what job they do. But this cannot be achieved by HSC, HSE and Local Authorities alone."

Prospect warned in September 2003, the new HSC language is code for a strategy shift from enforcement to a more softly-softly advisory role.

Occupational health specialist Morris Greenberg, writing in *The Lancet*, said the strategy amounted to "rationing" and accused HSC and the Government of not providing the data necessary to justify the cuts.

The new strategy does acknowledge the importance

of promoting greater involvement of workers, something pushed for by the TUC.

TUC Head of Safety Hugh Robertson said "we welcome the commitment to work with unions and improve the involvement of the workforce."

"We will be hoping to see practical examples of how this will be taken forward."

## SICKENING LACK OF WORKTIME CONTROL

Control over your working hours is not just necessary to run your life, it is essential to your health.

A study of Finnish local authority workers in the March 2004 edition of the journal *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* looked at self-rated health status, psychological distress and medically certified periods of sickness absence.

It found that women with a low level of worktime control were almost twice as likely to have poor self-rated health, were 40 per cent more likely to report psychological distress and had a 50 per cent higher risk of medically certified sickness absences than women with a high level of worktime control.

The health effects of worktime control were particularly evident among women with families.

Among men, worktime control was not associated with poor self-rated health or distress, but it predicted sickness absences in two subgroups: those with dependent children and those with manual occupations.

The authors conclude a low level of worktime control increases the risk of future health problems.

They say the results suggest that worktime control can help workers integrate their work and private lives successfully.

## TIME TO END 'JOKE' WORK DEATH PENALTIES

Unions and legal experts have renewed calls for a work death law.

The move comes after continuing Government delays in bringing forward promised corporate killing legislation.

At a 20 February conference at Cardiff University, David Jenkins, General Secretary of the Wales TUC, said: "February has been the worst month in the lives of many families across the world because their loved ones were killed in workplaces across the UK."

He added: "Too many people in Wales have to work everyday in dangerous conditions and the only way they can be protected is by strong corporate killing laws."

Mick Antoniw of Trade Union solicitors Thompson's said: "Existing law is too weak. Too many employers treat Health and Safety as a soft option."

"And it is just too easy to cut corners on safety to increase profitability ... This should include increased fines, punitive damages, disqualification of directors and, where a clear line of responsibility is established, the use of custodial sentences.

Current penalties are a joke and are just not taken seriously."

## US UNION FUND FOR 'GROUND ZERO' WORKERS

The emotional and physical scars for workers who helped clean up Manhattan's "Ground Zero" after the 11 September 2001 attacks haven't gone away.

In response, the union-backed Laborers Health and Safety Trust Fund and the Federal Emergency Management Agency are teaming up to address the medical problems.

*Lifelines*, the Laborers' health and safety magazine, reports the union and the agency have extended free crisis counselling for the Ground Zero cleanup workers until June 2004.

Dr Jim Melius of the Laborers' Fund says 19% of a sample of workers who helped clean up the site still suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Some 7,500 workers have been examined.

"If you've lost energy or your sex drive, can't sleep at night, have haunting images or just don't feel like doing the things you used to enjoy, it may be connected to your experiences around 9/11," Melius cautions.

"Another 40 % of the tested workers have some of the post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, while 48% have ear, nose and throat problems and 30% suffer breathing difficulties," he said.

[www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk)

## EQUALITY

EQUAL PAY  
REVIEWS

More than one in five employers (22%) have now checked or are in the process of checking that their pay system is fair to women, but more than half still have no plans to do an equal pay review, according to a new report by the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC).

The EOC report, *Monitoring progress on equal pay reviews*, said that there was still a hard core of employers who were failing to act, despite the fact that women still take home on average 18% less every hour if they work full-time, and 40% less every hour if they work part-time.

The private sector was particularly slow to take action. Only around one in five employers in manufacturing and private services have done an equal pay review, compared with nearly one in three public sector employers. 67% of manufacturing employers and 63% of private service sector employers said they had no plans to do an equal pay review.

The EOC wants Ministers to build on the progress they have already made and require all public sector bodies and their contractors to demonstrate action to tackle the pay gap. Public money should only be going to employers who are committed to tackling the pay gap.

"If employers continue to resist the need to carry out a pay review we may have to conclude that further



**EOC campaign poster**

legislation is the only way to guarantee a fair deal for women at work," said the EOC.

Key findings:

- 16% of all employers had completed an Equal Pay Review (EPR) by November 2003, 6% were in the process of doing one and 21% had plans to do one.
- 57% of employers had no plans to do an EPR
- 18% of employers in the public sector had completed an EPR, 14% were in the process, and a further 37% had plans to do one.
- 14% of employers in the private service sector had completed an EPR, 4% were in the process, and a further 19% had plans to do one.

Among employers who had done or were planning a pay review:

- 64% said they wished to be seen as good practice employers
- 51% said it was good business sense
- 41% said Government policy and publicity had influenced them
- 29% said EOC publicity and policy had influenced them.

[www.eoc.org.uk](http://www.eoc.org.uk)

MATERNITY  
PAY

The European Court of Justice has ruled that the UK is breaking European law on Maternity Pay. The Court's judgement results from the long-running case of Michelle Alabaster against the Woolwich Building Society and the Secretary of State for Social Security. The case, which began in 1999 and has been supported by the EOC, involved a dispute over the amount of SMP paid to Ms Alabaster during her maternity leave in 1995.

In Alabaster the European Court has ruled that a woman who receives a pay rise at any time before the end of her maternity leave must receive the benefit of this in the earnings related part of her maternity pay. Failure to do so is a breach of the equal pay provisions of European law. The ECJ said: 'to deny such an increase to a woman on maternity leave would discriminate against her since, had she not been pregnant, she would have received the pay rise'.

Ms Alabaster was a copy typist with Woolwich from December 1987; she had various promotions and by 1995 she was an administrator in the Client Services Section of the Computer Services Department. In July 1995 Ms Alabaster told the Woolwich that she was pregnant and she began her maternity leave on the 8th January 1996.

The Woolwich calculated Ms Alabaster's earnings-related statutory maternity pay on the basis of her earnings in the fifth and sixth

months of her pregnancy between 1 September and 31 October 1995. This is the period, under the present law, for calculating the 90% of earnings which is payable for the first six weeks of maternity leave. Her contract provided for a further four weeks of earnings-related pay, after which she received a flat rate.

In December Ms Alabaster received a pay increase of over 10% with effect from 1 December 1995; her pay rose from £11,619 to £12,801. However, this increase was not reflected in the calculation of her statutory maternity pay because it came after the relevant period for calculating normal earnings.

The Court held, any pay rise awarded between the beginning of the reference period (in this case 1 September) and the end of maternity leave must be reflected in the maternity pay.

Other cases on this issue have been awaiting hearings in the employment tribunals.

The EOC said: "We are delighted with this 'common-sense' decision which means that Statutory Maternity Pay must reflect what a woman would have earned had she not been on maternity leave. The Government must take action and close this legal loophole. Our investigation into the problems faced by working pregnant women, will also look more closely at problems in our existing legislation which may make it difficult for employers and individuals to manage pregnancy at work."

[www.eoc.org.uk](http://www.eoc.org.uk)



## RACISM

# Defeat the BNP

**Carl St Paul explains the importance of Unite Against Fascism Campaign ahead of June's elections**

UNITE Against Fascism is a national campaign with the objective of alerting British society to the rising threat of the extreme right gaining an electoral foothold in this country. It seeks to unite the broadest possible spectrum of society to counter this threat from the British National Party (BNP) in forthcoming elections.

Until recently, this country has not seen the kind of rise of the extreme right that has blighted many countries elsewhere in Europe. But there is a significant threat from the fascists in this country; in the seats they contested in May 2003, they won an average of 17% of the vote and in by-elections since May, have averaged 23% of the vote.

Given the variety of electoral systems in place – proportional representation in the elections to the Greater London Assembly and the European Parliament – there is a very real threat that the BNP could gain a significant platform in elected institutions.

As few as 18% of the electorate may vote in June's European elections and BNP leader Nick Griffin would only need about 9% of the vote to win a seat in the North West constituency in which he is standing.

This campaign has been initiated by the Anti Nazi League, the National Assembly



*True colours: A BNP member gives a fascist salute as anti fascist protesters struggle with Police and BNP bodyguards as they try to block the car of Jean-Marie Le Pen of the French National Front and Nick Griffin BNP leader in Manchester last month*

Against Racism, MPs, MEPs, trade unions and faith and community organisations and has the backing of the FBU and TUC and all major affiliates. All those involved realised the fact that unity was the key to defeating the BNP.

The event gained a lot of national coverage and helped to build a very successful launch rally at the London Astoria at the end of February. Trade unionists, plus stars from the world of music, television and film, all came together to say no to the race hatred politics of the BNP. We hope to replicate the success of the event at rallies across the country in order to show that the BNP are not welcome in any of our communities. French fascist Jean-Marie Le Pen's visit to England was not the success hoped for by his BNP hosts. The National Front's leader was chased away from Manchester, scared off from visiting Birmingham, and ended up in BNP fuhrer Nick Griffin's ample backyard. The reason was determined and organised resistance from Unite Against Fascism.

Le Pen's press conference in a hotel in Altrincham was held to the sound of a cacophony of protest. After a rally of more than 200 demonstrators – including Labour, Liberal and Respect members, a local clergywoman and a Holocaust survivor – discovered his location, Le Pen's

plush entourage faced a lively sit down protest to block in his chauffeur-driven car. This was then covered with rubbish to match its contents. Griffin's besuited thugs – organised by former Combat 18 brute Warren Bennett – showed their true colours as they lashed out at protesters.

Le Pen would have received an equally warm welcome in Birmingham, had he had the courage to turn up. But over 1,000 Unite supporters celebrated to music and speeches in the city centre when it became clear that his £50 per head fund-raising dinner for the BNP had been ruined. The venue had relented to public pressure to cancel the event and no-one else would take him.

The BNP is now trying to present itself as a 'respectable' political party. But we must remember that they are a fascist party and must expose them as such at every opportunity. Currently they seek to attract votes on the basis of racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia and the vilification of refugees and asylum seekers. But fascists also stand for the expulsion of Black and Asian people from this country, the destruction of the trade unions and the elimination of basic democratic rights. We urge every FBU branch to do what they can in building a united and broad front against this common threat.

As well as the mass leafleting there are a series of carnivals planned for the run up to the June elections, including two huge events in London and Manchester to feature major chart acts.

The evidence is already stacking up that a united, national campaign is the most effective weapon we can use against the fascists. There is still much to do to ensure that they don't make their hoped-for electoral breakthrough in June. Raising the turnout will be vital in achieving this – the prerequisite for which will be confident, mass campaigning that celebrates the diversity of life in Britain.

**Carl St Paul** is Secretary of B&EMM and active in the Unite Against Fascism campaign. For more information email [unite@natfhe.org.uk](mailto:unite@natfhe.org.uk).



# RETAINED

THE Pay Dispute has made for a long two years. Since the last Dispute in 1977, the pay of the Retained had fallen well behind and we were still being treated as second class Firefighters giving a cheap but effective service to our Employers. This was about to change. The claim for parity for all Retained Members with our full-time comrades was at the core of the Union's Fair Pay Campaign.

Once the Campaign began, the Media was quick to portray the Service as greedy because it had dared to ask for a decent living wage. What quickly materialised was the public's lack of awareness of the Retained Duty system and its vital role within the community that we serve. At best the awareness was low and the perception of the work of the Retained was not recognised. We were criticised publicly for wanting to provide our families with a realistic standard of living, to make the Retained service more attractive and to fill the 3,000 Retained vacancies which would enhance cover in those communities where it was lacking.

The Government's spin was that the Retained were not on strike. It gave slots on prime time national TV where the RFU announced that we, the Retained, were still working. This was of course to cause division between wholetime and Retained. NRC Officials made daily radio interviews but failed to make it on National TV, despite efforts by the National Leadership and Officials in the Regions. The Government-led media was not going to allow the truth to get out.

It became apparent quite early on in the negotiations that the Employers were only prepared to pledge a specific sum for the Retained pay increase and that if we were to pursue further increases in the Retaining Fee it would be at the expense of other monies earned on the Turnout/Attendance Fees.

Feelings were that we could adopt a



## The best achievable pay deal

moral stance and try and hold out for more money. But there was no more money. We strongly believed this strategy of holding out for more would not have been in the best interests of the Retained membership. Also, what was being offered was certainly better than what there would have been without our involvement.

On 14 October 2003 the National Retained Committee were presented with the Employer's pay proposal for the Retained, which was based on a model of 200 calls and a maximum pay bill of 13.74%. After a very long discussion, we reluctantly agreed the figures which agreed the principle of pay parity and a new pay structure covering all existing fees and allowances. The rest, as we say, is history!

### THE FUTURE

On behalf of the National Retained Committee I can say that we look forward to the future challenges to the Retained Service including IRMPs, IPDS,

**Morris Butterfield examines the pay dispute and what the subsequent negotiations produced for Retained members**

Wholetime/Retained, Duty Systems and anything else the Government and Fire Authorities may try to introduce.

We will seek to improve the structure and work of the Committee, through Union Education to strengthen our voice to ensure the equality of pay and conditions continue for all Firefighters working the Retained Duty System.

We are here for advice and to assist any FBU Officials/Members and are able to make ourselves available to attend any Brigade/Regional Meetings necessary to educate and inform our members of the challenges ahead.

On behalf of the Committee I would also like to personally state how professional our pay negotiators Andy Gilchrist, Ruth Winters and Mike Fordham were during those meetings, how well they portrayed the Retained service and how strongly they put our case.

Helen Hill, NRC Secretary and I, were present during the Employers' proposals for the new Retained Pay Structure. To say the Employers have no understanding or appreciation of Retained Firefighters is an understatement, they still want us on the cheap.

The last two years have been busy, hectic and frustrating but a huge learning curve for the National Retained Committee who apart from the pay dispute have been involved with Fairness at Work, Education, Health and Safety and Welfare, and Pensions appeal. But this could not happen without the support of Retained Members Nationally, by Brigade, Regional and National Officials, and Head Office Staff.

**Morris Butterfield** is EC Member, Retained.

## LABOUR LINK

# Should I stay or should I go ...

**Kevin Maguire, an experienced observer of British politics and trade unions, looks at the current issues around affiliation to the Labour Party**

THE mood of trade union leaders after the expulsion from the Labour Party of the RMT rail and maritime workers was sombre. An important bit of the Party's history had departed, a union that in 1899 proposed the creation of a political organisation to represent working people in Parliament becoming 105 years on the first to be kicked out.

Nostalgia was undoubtedly a factor but the grief was grounded above all else in the belief that the loss of the RMT was a significant blow to the campaign to reclaim the Labour Party from the Blairites.

The lack of regret, indeed barely disguised glee, among the ultra Blairites suggested that they too, knew an injury to one was an injury to all and the solidarity of the campaign had been fractured.

I've spent more years than I care to count attending union conferences in resorts beginning with 'B' and this year Bridlington is back on the circuit alongside Brighton, Blackpool and Bournemouth.

I guarantee we scribblers and our colleagues in the electronic media will be out in force when the Fire Brigades Union decides where its destiny lies.

The route pursued by RMT was in the opposite direction to that – so far

– of other unions affiliated to the Labour Party, the RMT's isolation symbolised by its decision to hold the crucial meetings in Glasgow rather than the mandatory 'B' resort.

Nor were the other unions in any doubt that if it affiliated to rival parties, the RMT would be shown the door under Labour's constitution.

Unison is threatening to withdraw support from the constituencies of Labour MPs who consistently oppose union policy while simultaneously flexing its political and financial muscles within the party nationally. The GMB is similarly reviewing help for recidivist MPs (think Peter Mandelson in Hartlepool) and has cut funding nationally, a sanction also imposed by the CWU communication workers. TGWU representatives on the Labour national executive committee are

**'A clear majority of the newly awkward unions believe the Party is reclaimable, that it can be shifted back to a recognisable, traditional Labour agenda'**

expected to fight for union policy under new General Secretary Tony Woodley.

Efforts by Labour's Old Queen Street Headquarters to strike a £40 million, five-year, funding deal was blocked by the unions aware their bargaining leverage would be reduced. Bectu, the broadcasting union, balloted members on whether to remain affiliated after its conference voted to consider severing the link in protest at the Government's failure

to protect jobs in TV. The poll produced a clear majority in favour of retaining the Labour tie.

The potential power of a united union movement was demonstrated at last September's Labour conference in Bournemouth when the 'Big Four' – Unison, Amicus, T&G and GMB – worked together to inflict a series of defeats on the party hierarchy. Tony Dubbins of the GPMU is also attempting to co-ordinate votes at June's national policy forum to secure victories for a trade union agenda or, failing that, to ensure the issues are discussed at the Party's annual conference this September in Brighton.

Tony Blair is in the twilight of his Prime Ministership, his command of the Party and electorate as a whole weakened to the point where the question asked is when, not if, he will be out of Downing Street.

A clear majority of the newly awkward unions believe the party is reclaimable, that it can be shifted back to a recognisable, traditional Labour agenda and have opted to stay and fight rather than leave and shout.

Since leaving Labour in February branches and regions of the RMT have moved closer to the Scottish Socialist Party, Greens and George Galloway's Respect coalition. All say what the RMT wants to hear but do they have any clout? So to Bridlington and the FBU where the unofficial anthem will be that grand 'Clash' song: 'Should I stay or should I go...'

**Kevin Maguire** is Chief Reporter of The Guardian newspaper and former political editor of the Daily Mirror

**Today's media play a key role in industrial disputes and trade unionists should support efforts to maintain and develop a democratic and accountable media, says Granville Williams**

THE media can play a powerful role in mobilising support for or against industrial disputes, even for or against going to war. So the answer to the question 'Do you trust the media to tell the truth and give you unbiased information?' is not just of academic interest.

Clearly, the answer, based on MORI polls year after year is no, people do not trust the media. Journalists are down there with the lowest of the low, amongst pariah groups such as politicians and estate agents.

But a survey about a year ago of more than 2,000 people, Trusted Professions...and others, produced a surprising set of results to the question, 'How much do you trust the following to tell the truth?' Top of the poll (85%) were journalists for ITV News, BBC News and Channel 4 News, followed by head teachers, people who run charities and judges. Journalists on broadsheet papers like The Guardian and local papers polled 65% and 60% respectively. It was journalists on the red-top tabloids such as The Sun and Mirror who came in at the bottom (14%). No change there, then.

But there are problems with the notion of truth when it comes to reporting industrial actions like the Fire Service dispute of 2002-2003, or the epic industrial struggle of the Miners in 1984-85. Sections of the right-wing press were hostile from the outset to both disputes. The anti-union stance of Rupert Murdoch's papers, The Sun, News of the World, The Times and The Sunday Times, which have nearly 40% of national



SHOUT/REPORTDIGITAL.COZZUK

*Will they get it right? Journalists are increasingly mistrusted*

# News you can trust?

newspaper circulation, is well known.

It was also reinforced by the Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday, and the traditional voices of Tory England, The Daily and Sunday Telegraph. Even the Financial Times had an editorial (November 12, 2002) which urged the Government to give the Firefighters an ultimatum: 'accept new terms or think about alternative careers'. It concluded, 'The possibility of dismissal helps concentrate minds wonderfully'.

After the first strike in November 2002 public support for the Firefighters was clear, in spite of hostile press coverage and matched by disapproval of the way the Government had mishandled the dispute. As a result we saw a major and aggressive spin offensive by the Labour Government to undermine public support, one which the right wing press were willing accomplices in promoting.

The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (CPBF) was founded in the aftermath of another assault by the

media on trades unions in the winter of 1978-79 and since then we have sought to promote policies to develop a diverse, democratic and accountable media. We still have a long way to go to achieve these policies, but they are ones that trades unionists should support, especially in the current climate.

We believe that concentrated media power often weakens or undermines democracy. If newspapers print partial truths, downright lies or promote prejudice this does damage to the democratic process.

More worryingly, politicians seem to want to curry favour from powerful media moguls. In 1995 it was Tony Blair who flew to Australia to address Rupert Murdoch's executives and suggested Labour would support policies to boost his media ownership in the UK. Since then Labour has been careful not to antagonise Murdoch and lose the support of

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# MEDIA

## FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

papers like The Sun in the 1997 and 2001 elections. In turn all of Rupert Murdoch's newspapers worldwide supported the policies pursued by George Bush and Tony Blair in the war on Iraq.

In March 2004 it was the turn of Tory leader, Michael Howard, to address the assembled News Corp executives in Cancun, Mexico.

In marked contrast to our distrust of sections of the press, over the years we have trusted television (well, most of the time) as a source of impartial news. But there are problems looming here too. Rupert Murdoch has long believed that the notion of impartial news should be thrown out. In the USA Fox News is an example of the sort of TV news he prefers. Any pretence of balance is spurious. The news programme was the cheerleader for the war on Iraq and unapologetically continues to support the Bush administration.

Our broadcasting media is in the throes

For more information on the CPBF visit its website: [www.cpbp.org.uk](http://www.cpbp.org.uk) or contact the campaign at: CPBF  
23 Orford Road London  
E17 9NL; 020 8521 5932

of deregulation, with light touch guidelines replacing clear programming requirements. Media ownership rules have been loosened so that we now have a single ITV and even the prospect of a merged C4 and Channel 5. There is also the threat that the BBC, the flagship public service broadcaster may have its licence fee cut or even abolished, and replaced by subscription.

The Hutton report slated the BBC for sloppy reporting. The report itself was deeply flawed and unbalanced, but it has given support to those critics of the BBC who want to weaken or abolish it. It is amazing how sections of the press have

attacked the BBC for sloppy reporting yet the reporting standards of the very papers criticising the BBC are consistently far lower.

Between now and 2006 the BBC Charter is up for renewal. The monster regulatory body OFCOM is conducting a major review of public service broadcasting, and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport is also under a major consultation exercise. If you care about the future of broadcasting, and receiving news and information you can trust, it is vital to let your views be known. The CPBF is mounting a major campaign to defend public service broadcasting and the BBC. The alternative, broadcasting dominated by commercialism and billionaire media owners, is not an attractive one. We have to make sure it does not happen.

**Granville Williams** edits the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom journal Free Press



**ADIA TRADE UNIONIST** you regularly write for the paper as your union rep, so why not support the paper that backs the unions? You should be reading the Morning Star — the only daily paper that carries real stories about real people — people like you. Only the Morning Star stands shoulder to shoulder with real trade unionists in their campaign to take back the railways back into public ownership.

Backs the call to repeal all anti-union legislation.

Opposes privatisation and private-sector milking of public services through PPP and PFI.

Campaigns for international solidarity not imperialist wars.

Demands restoration of the link between average earnings and the basic pension.

Supports the call for referendums on the EU constitution and the euro — and is anti against both.

The Morning Star also provides, for just 10p a day, unrivalled daily coverage of the trade union movement, political and general news and comment, together with a richly detailed feature page, provocative feature articles and lively reporting of sport, music, arts, drama and books.

If you want to become a daily reader, write to or email our circulation department who will provide the name and address of the nearest shop that supplies your Morning Star.

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## AN ALTERNATIVE VOICE

**John Haylett and Mick Rix put the case for the one daily newspaper that backed Firefighters and Control Staff all the way**

FIRE Brigades Union members came up against the reality of Britain's "free press" when they began to take action in support of their entirely reasonable claim to a professional salary of £30,000.

Suddenly, the standard portrayal of Firefighters doing their duty in burning buildings, rail disasters and terrorist incidents as heroes went out the window.

In a moment, they were transformed into greedy, lazy defenders of a regime dedicated to providing them with a cushy number at the expense of the downtrodden taxpayer.

New Labour Ministers made the bullets for the anti-FBU media to fire and, in turn, quoted the snide attacks on Firefighters as the views of the people.

One Scottish Executive Minister went so far in repeating the Cabinet-inspired lying propaganda that FBU members were opposed to women and Black people joining the Service that he called union activists 'fascist bastards'.

Only one daily newspaper stuck with the FBU membership throughout its epic dispute: the Morning Star.

Not because the Morning Star sees the FBU as a special case: the paper has stood in solidarity with the miners, seafarers, printers, railworkers, teachers, civil servants and every other section of the

working class that has been driven to defend itself against ruthless employers, both private and public but because that is the reason for the paper's existence.

Despite its meagre resources, our paper punches above its weight in the ongoing struggle of working people against the rich and powerful.

The Morning Star opposes the New Labour pro-business project while recognising that allowing the return to Government of Michael Howard's Tories would make the task of seeking justice for trade unionists, pensioners and students even harder.

**The Morning Star opposes the New Labour pro-business project while recognising that allowing the return to Government of Michael Howard's Tories would make the task of seeking justice for trade unionists, pensioners and students even harder**

It could do even more if its circulation was higher and its financial foundations more secure.

The Morning Star does not profit from the big-business advertising revenue that the rest of the media depends on. It relies exclusively on its circulation income and backing from the labour movement.

If every FBU organisation was to order a daily copy and also to buy shares in the People's Press Printing Society (PPPS) – the readers' co-operative that publishes the Morning Star – the future would be brighter not only for the Morning Star but also for workers' solidarity.

For further information, contact us at the address below or the new Morning Star website at [www.morningstaronline.co.uk](http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk)

*John Haylett is editor of the Morning Star  
Mick Rix is chairman of PPPS*

## How Murdoch could take over BBC TV channels

THE 2003 Communications Act enshrines a more competitive and deregulatory spirit into the media environment where the aim is, above all, to create a dynamic and competitive media industry.

The most controversial point of the legislation is the clause that allows terrestrial broadcasting companies – BBC1, BBC2, ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 – to be bought by dominant newspaper groups or non-EU companies for the first time. This could lead to the possibility of Rupert Murdoch extending his grip over the British media.

Furthermore, regulation is now firmly "only in the last instance", subject to general competition legislation and policed by a new "light-touch" regulator of both media and telecommunications, OFCOM.

What is the make-up of OFCOM, this new "light as a feather", independent regulator? Consider the profiles of its two main officials.

Stephen Carter, chief executive, is the former managing director of the highly unsuccessful and debt-ridden cable company NTL. In a speech in January 2004, he summed up OFCOM's approach: "We are, fundamentally free-market and light-touch, tempered by a bit of social justice" ([www.ofcom.org.uk](http://www.ofcom.org.uk)).

Chairman David Currie was a Labour Peer, Party donor, former adviser to Blair and Dean of the Business School of City University. His previous experience of regulation was that he was on the board of the energy regulator OFGEM.

They are certainly well qualified as businesspeople and well connected to Number Ten. But their conception of media that it

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**MEDIA****FROM PREVIOUS PAGE**

is, above all, an economic activity explains why the millionaires who run our newspapers and broadcasting companies are hardly shaking in their boots.

Indeed, one of the first decisions that OFCOM made was to appoint Luke Johnson as the new chairman of Channel 4. He is a businessman with no experience of broadcasting apart from the fact that he made his money from owning the restaurants in which TV stars eat.

What are his real qualifications? According to someone who knows him: "Luke's completely money-mad. There is not a scintilla of understanding of public service broadcasting in him. He does have a sort of glamour that comes from being rich and comparatively young" (The Guardian, 2 February 2004).

■ This is an extract from a recent speech by Des Freedman, who is a lecturer in communications and cultural studies at Goldsmiths College, University of London and author of *The Television Policies of the Labour Party, 1951-2001* (Frank Cass) and co-editor of *War and the Media: Reporting Conflict 24/7* (Sage).

**ON THE MOVE?**

*Members are reminded to advise their Brigade Membership Secretary of any change of address. Head Office should be advised of any changes of next of kin or nominations for benefits.*

**INTERNATIONAL**

# Colombia: what's it got to do with me?

## Ruth Winters reports on a recent visit

WHAT'S it got to do with me? This must be a question mumbled on every station, control room or workplace in the Fire Service at some stage or another when we put out circulars or articles on this or any other international issue. Well, I hope this article can address the question.

The picture of the young man you see opposite is of Robert Montealegre, a volunteer Firefighter from the Cali Region in Colombia. Robert was a community worker, well respected and dedicated to the people he lived and worked with. Part of his commitment to his community was shown through his involvement in the Colombian Fire Service. The picture is of him in his Fire Service uniform.

Robert stood up for his fellow workers and spoke out against oppression and

wrong doing. He had a point of view and expressed it. In fact, Robert did what most of you do on a daily basis. His reward for this was that he disappeared one day and 46 days later reappeared dead, murdered by the paramilitaries.

I met Robert's mother when I visited Colombia as part of a UK trade union delegation in February. An ordinary woman living in extraordinary circumstances, she showed us a photo album of Robert through his life and ultimately in death. I saw pictures of his Fire Service funeral, a funeral that could have been anyone of ours had we happened to live in Colombia rather than the UK.

The whole family is now in hiding because they have also now been targeted by paramilitaries. We need to help Robert's family and others like them. If that isn't a good enough reason to be involved in these matters, then I don't know what is.



**Bombed: the  
offices of a  
unionised  
water company**



The situation must be publicised within the international community over and over again. Otherwise the opponents of free speech, free trade unionism and freedom of association will continue the oppressive, dictatorial and life-threatening behaviour that is an every day occurrence for women and men in Colombia.

On my recent trip there, we met many community leaders, politicians, government ministers, but most importantly trade unionists. The stories we heard of torture, detention, disappearances, displacement of communities and murders were confirmed again and again. It would appear that the only people who actually refuse to admit these contraventions of human rights are the Colombian government themselves. And therein lies the problem.

We are continually told (by politicians of course!) that the government of President Uribe is trying to improve the situation and it is pointed out that the numbers of deaths have reduced over the last year. What is not highlighted, however, is that the number of detentions has gone up dramatically. People are detained without trail on average for some 14 months and sometimes up to five years.

Also, the growing use of paid informants in communities has only made life more oppressive – and the government's plan to broaden the number of combatants involved in the conflict at local level is effectively making the military aspects of Colombia's problems the only issue. That



Robert did what most of you do on a daily basis. He stood up for his fellow workers and spoke out against oppression and wrong doing. So they murdered him.

is hardly the way to achieve a peaceful, negotiated end to the conflict.

We met many women in varying circumstances. Some were the relatives of murdered trade unionists and community leaders who then become targets themselves and are left to fend for their families and find new places to live. Some, whose male relatives had been imprisoned, had

to travel up to 24 hours through areas occupied by paramilitaries or guerrillas in order to visit their loved ones. We also met women and men who had been kidnapped or detained and tortured in the most horrendous manner.

We met trade unionists living under death threats who have had to send their children out of the country to save their lives. We met people in prison who are political prisoners, mostly charged with "rebellion". The word sounds grand doesn't it. But what it actually means is you have been speaking out against the government's agenda and policies, or you have been organising workers and communities.

We met women and men like us who stand up for their families, their beliefs, their political views and the rights of others in a country that they love. The stark reality is that they are women and men who do what we do. The only difference is that we live in a different country. In fact writing an article like this as a Colombian in Colombia would probably get the author detained, disappeared or killed. This is no exaggeration.

It is very difficult to fit the realities of our Colombian sisters and brothers into a short article, even if you have read all previous pieces on the country. I had only ever imagined living in a police state before. But for a short week, I actually experienced it, experienced the every day norm for Colombians.

Some of the stories we heard from the people directly involved were extremely



**Militarised: a barracks that was a public nursery**

# INTERNATIONAL

**Ruth Winters, FBU President, went to Colombia in the first week of February as part of a trade union delegation organised by Justice for Colombia (JFC). Also on the delegation were: Alan Miles, an FBU member and film-maker, Bill Spiers, STUC General Secretary, Kevin Rowan, Northern TUC Regional Secretary, Barry Camfield, TGWU Assistant General Secretary, Matt Dykes from SERTUC, Mick Rix, JFC chair, Roger Lyons, TUC President, Simon Steyne, TUC International Officer, Louise Richards, Chief Executive of War on Want, Jeremy Corbyn MP of the parliamentary human rights group, Richard Howitt MEP, ELP spokesman on foreign affairs and human rights, and Isabel Hilton from The Guardian newspaper. For more information see [www.justiceforcolombia.org](http://www.justiceforcolombia.org)**

emotional and upsetting. But the reality is they don't need our pity, our tears or declarations of their bravery. They need our action and our continuing deeds of support. They need us to use our political influence and financial help. They need us to continue to visit their country to see their reality and they need us to lobby our Government to stop military aid to Colombia.

Once again our money is being used in our name to oppress others. Once again our Government are not doing enough to make the Uribe Government comply with ILO conventions and international human rights.

Once again international global economics and its constraints are the main thrust behind the oppression of a people. Despite the oppression, the resolve, political stance and community involvements of the women and men we met should be held up as an example to us all.

Last month we had two Colombian sisters – Yolanda and Marlene – visiting the UK and attending the Women's TUC. A human rights worker and a trade unionist from the teachers' union, their message was clear: your branch or you as an individual should affiliate to Justice for Colombia and above all else don't forget them.

If Colombia is to change for the better from within it can only be done by firstly exposing what's going on to the international community. This means we must use our voice to make our Government use its influence for the good of the Colombian people and to stop encouraging the militarisation and take-over of the country by vast multinational organisations (see Coca Cola latest). What we must do as

individuals and trade unions is speak for them and with them.

## JUST POLITICS?

This all sounds highly political. You may think this is just all a bunch of mad leftie guerrillas and terrorists involved here and that they must have done something wrong!

I addressed this question to Wilson Borja, a Colombian Congressman who continually fights for justice. His reply was stark and honest: "If you have a political point of view that does not make you a terrorist, if you speak up for your community that does not make you a guerrilla, if you speak up for your trade union and its members that does not make you a danger to society or rebellious. Unless, of course, you live in Colombia. Do these things make you terrorist, guerrillas or rebellious in the UK, no it's called human rights and freedom".

He also described how our recent dispute would not have been allowed to happen in Colombia. Most of the leaders, including branch reps would either disappear, be detained or be killed. The rest would be threatened along with families. This, he said, explained why trade union participation is at an all time low in Colombia.

So when we in our Union call for justice, it cannot be just about our sector and it cannot be only for our country. For human rights only for ourselves are not human rights at all. Human rights must be for all. We are and I hope always will be, a truly internationalist trade union.

**Ruth Winters is President of the FBU**

## EU ENLARGEMENT AND JOBS

The EU's eastward enlargement, which kicked off May 1, will put pressure on wages, worry German workers. Earnings in Germany are four times as high as in Poland, and eight times as high as in the Baltic states. Also, qualification levels are high in the east.

The employer association, BDA, maintains that nothing will change on the labour market initially, arguing that although workers in the accession countries will be entitled to the four basic EU freedoms – free movement of people, capital, goods and services – their rights, except for Malta and Cyprus, will be limited by transition periods to the old EU states' labour markets for up to seven years.

It also says that thousands of workers from central and eastern Europe have already migrated to Germany over the past few years so pressure on wages would now only be noticed in the border regions, if at all.

Still, the German food industry union worries that businesses from the new member states can offer their services in the old member states from day one and that this will lead to "wage dumping".

The Brussels-based European Trade Union Confederation, meanwhile, doesn't think that wage differentials will lead to job losses, pointing to already existing differences between the old EU member states.

In addition wages are compensated partly by purchasing power differentials between the individual member states, it argues. The disproportionately high growth rates in the accession states also create scope for strong wage increases in the new member states, says the ETUC, although it admits that closing the gap between east and west will likely take at least a decade.

**[www.faz.com](http://www.faz.com)**

## FRENCH FIREFIGHTERS

Thousands of French firefighters – *les sapeurs-pompiers* – demonstrated in a day of action in Paris in March. Before the 7,000-strong demonstrations began, *les sapeurs-pompiers* lay on the ground in memory of the 235 of their brothers and sisters who have died in service since 1990. The CGT, FO and FASPP trade unions who organised the action are demanding a pay rise that reflects the dangers inherent in firefighters' work. They also are seeking to defend their pensions. Unions say legislation making people work longer for a pension had cut the retirement payout received by most firefighters to 940 euros (£620) a month from 1,400. In February some 40% of the 35,000 full-time firefighters in France took strike action for a day.

## EU DAY OF ACTION

Over 1.6 million people took to the streets in early April in response to the call put out by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and its affiliates. They were demonstrating in towns and cities across Europe for policy changes and more social justice. A million people converged on Rome to protest against the Berlusconi government's pensions policy. In Germany, 500,000 marched for a brighter future. French trade unions staged events the length and breadth of France. Central and Eastern European countries, including Slovenia, Hungary and Poland also joined in with a range of conferences and rallies.

## OLYMPICS LETHAL

Greek unions are warning that construction workers are risking their lives to try to get Athens ready for this summer's Olympic Games. The Greek construction workers union says that 13 workers involved in Olympic projects had already died. It compares this to one death in the run-up to the 2000 Sydney Games and he blamed it on companies

cutting costs. The union fears that more workers will die as the deadline draws nearer. The union says average working hours are being pushed up from five to seven a day, to between seven and 12 hours a day – partly as construction firms allegedly seek to finish ahead of schedule and claim early completion bonuses. Five of the workers are said to have been killed at the Olympic village alone.

[www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)



JESS HURD/REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK

**Three million attended a rally in Rome two years ago to protest at Government plans for labour market reforms which will make it easier for employers to sack staff**

## ITALIANS STRIKE

The three main Italian union confederations held a nationwide stoppage on 26 March of at least four hours over the government's plans to cut pensions. The stoppage followed a joint conference of 6,000 activists, indicating a renewed unity on the trade union side. Unions were responding to pensions proposals from the government of Silvio Berlusconi that now seem final and involve an increase in the retirement age of up to five years. At present Italians with 35 years of pensions contributions can retire at 57. Under the government's proposals, from 2008, they will have to work until they are 60, rising to 61 in 2010 and possibly 62 in 2013. The last strike on pensions was in October 2003

[www.lrd.org.uk](http://www.lrd.org.uk)

## TEN YEARS SINCE THE END OF APARTHEID

April 27 1994 marked the end of South Africa's apartheid system. During apartheid Black South Africans could not vote, own land or property outside certain designated areas, could only work in certain jobs and could not marry outside their racial group. The police, army and public administration – were geared towards the protection of white privilege at all costs.

Since 1994, South Africa has been grappling with the daunting task of unravelling institutionalised racism in every sphere of society. Reversing the legacy of 300 years of colonialism and apartheid was never likely in 10 years. But South Africans have confounded the doom-mongers and today in many ways act as a beacon to the world, with their strong commitment to democracy, disarmament and the peaceful resolution of domestic and international conflicts. South Africans are now engaged in a massive collective effort to build a non-racial and more equal society.

South African people are better off now than they were before the end of apartheid, in almost every sphere. We also need to assess South Africa according to how far it has moved towards achieving the targets the government set itself following the 1994 elections; the goals of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the ideals and aspirations of its people as set out in the new Constitution.

While the world takes for granted the freedoms gained just ten years ago, South Africans are constantly engaged in the process of building democracy. Civil society has kept the spirit of the anti-apartheid era alive through creative and popular social movements, including the Treatment Action Campaign and the coalition for a Basic Income Grant. These movements have been empowering South African citizens to use their Constitution to demand their rights to health, to land, to food and housing.

[www.actsa.org](http://www.actsa.org)



**NEWS EXTRA**

# Stop confrontation over defibrillators

LONDON firefighters in Tower Hamlets have voted by 122 to 21 to take industrial action short of a strike in a dispute over plans to force firefighters to attend ambulance calls. Members are likely to refuse to attend training, handle equipment and refuse to attend ambulance calls.

The union balloted after London Fire Brigade managers refused to enter negotiations and tried to force through a pilot scheme. London FBU said the issue raised major concerns about the ambulance service's inability to provide a speedy response to major medical emergencies.

They said firefighters, unlike paramedics, were not trained to make medical diagnoses nor could they administer drugs. They are unhappy about firefighters being forced to attend ambulance calls because:



**Mick Shergold:**  
*it's not about  
firefighters  
refusing to use  
defibrillators*

- A two-day training course will not equip firefighters to deal with the range of medical conditions encountered;
- Firefighters attending an ambulance call will be unable to attend subsequent fire calls that may be received;
- Attending such calls is outside of the national agreement reached after the fire service pay dispute in 2002/2003

Mick Shergold, regional secretary, said: "This is not about firefighters refusing to use defibrillators. It is about firefighters not wanting to be ordered to attend a

range of medical emergencies for which they will not be adequately trained, at the expense of providing a proper fire service.

"We are not trained to make medical diagnoses. It makes as much sense as sending an ambulance to a fire because they have fire extinguishers on board."

"We do not want industrial action. London Fire Brigade must stop their confrontational approach, negotiate and discuss with the FBU what role firefighters may have in helping to reduce the unacceptably high level of deaths from heart attacks.

"The Ambulance Service also need to explain why it cannot deliver a speedy response to the most urgent medical emergencies. If it cannot perform the basics of what it is set up to do then that needs to be addressed by the health service.

## LETTERS



**Pete Skinley: only winners because of apathy and disunity are the Government and the Employers**

### Union must reunite ASAP

Dear Firefighter,  
As I have officially retired from Fire Service, I would like to place on record my appreciation to all Head Office Staff who have looked after me during my tenure as the EC Member for the No 9 Region. It has been much appreciated.

My thanks also go to the General Secretary, President, National Officers, EC Members, Sectional Officials, Regional, Brigade, and Branch reps of the No 9 Region for your support and comradeship over the years.

While I understand that member's feelings with regard to the dispute are running high, history will show that those members who are directing their anger and bile at the leadership are wrong. This

Union needs to re-unite as quickly as possible, because the only winners at the moment because of apathy and disunity are the Government and the Employers who want to see this Union smashed.

**Pete Skinley**  
**OOT, former EC Member, Region 9**  
**October 1998 – December 2003**



The Firefighter welcomes letters from readers.

Please send them to:

FBU Head Office, Bradley House,  
68 Coombe Road, Kingston Upon  
Thames, Surrey KT2 7AE or  
[firefighter@fbu.org.uk](mailto:firefighter@fbu.org.uk), including  
your name, address, branch/  
region and a contact telephone  
number.

# DIARY



Tuesday **11 May** – **BRIDLINGTON**  
 Friday **14 May**  
 FBU Annual Conference

Thursday **27 May** – **TENBY**  
 Friday **28 May**  
 Wales Fire Conference

Saturday **June 19** – **LONDON**  
 National Pay Up for Pensions demo

Friday **16 July**–  
 Sunday **18 July** **DORSET**  
 Tolpuddle Festival 2004

Monday **13 September** – **BRIGHTON**  
 Thursday **16 September**  
 TUC Conference 2004

Sunday **26 September** – **BRIGHTON**  
 Thursday **30 September**  
 Labour Party Conference

Friday, **8 October** – **WORTLEY HALL**  
 Sunday **10 October**  
 FBU Black and Ethnic Minority  
 Members School

Friday **15 October** – **WORTLEY HALL**  
 Sunday **17 October**  
 FBU Gay and Lesbian School

Saturday **30 October** – **WORTLEY HALL**  
 Friday **5 November**  
 FBU National School

# OBITUARY

## Stewart Charnley

STEWART was extremely proud of being Scottish. To his lifelong annoyance however, he was born in Birmingham on 17th September 1944, a fact that his English comrades never let him forget whenever there was vigorous debate on any Scottish/English issue.

Stewart joined the Fire Service in Glasgow in May 1963, serving 12 months before transferring to the West Riding Fire Service in Yorkshire. Soon afterwards he started his union career as Branch Official at Thorne Fire Station. In 1966/67 he became an Area Secretary in West Riding.

On the formation of the South Yorkshire Fire Service in 1974, he was the first elected Brigade Chair, defeating Fred Wright, now a Councillor on the South Yorkshire Fire Authority, in a membership ballot. In 1977, prior to the first National Strike, he was elected to the position of Regional Chair and worked extremely hard to ensure that the outcome of the dispute was in the members' best interests. On the election of Stan Fitzsimmons as President of the FBU in 1983, Stewart was in turn elected to represent the Yorkshire and Humberside Region on the Executive Council.

He was a very committed and resourceful member of the EC, unswerving in his support for Ken Cameron and left wing politics generally, both inside and outside the Union. Along with many Officials, he worked tirelessly during the Miners Strike in 1984 and in many other disputes. Internationally, Stewart was a steadfast supporter of the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the Palestinian People. In 1991, upon the election of Ronnie Scott as President of the FBU, Stewart was elected as Vice President. It was a role he relished and held until his retirement from the Service.

Alongside his union role, Stewart was elected to the Wortley Hall Executive Committee in 1987 and then the Management Committee in 1990, becoming President of Wortley Hall in



*Stewart Charnley: committed and resourceful*

1996. Stewart was justifiably proud of the work both he and the Management Committee at Wortley initiated, on behalf of trades unionists and community members, to make the Hall a wonderful facility to hold conferences, take holidays and on occasions, educate themselves!

On South Yorkshire Festival days, Stewart liked nothing better than serving behind the bar in what was to become known as the Charnley Arms (a bar under canvas). Friends and Comrades will have many wonderful memories of Stewart or 'Stewie' as a delegation from Australia preferred to call him.

Stewart was an exceptional man, true to his beliefs, never shirking from what he thought to be right. He was a good comrade who will be remembered and missed by everyone who was fortunate enough to have known him.

Our thoughts are with his wife Betty and sons Paul and Alan and their families at this sad time.

**Mick Headon, FBU Regional Treasurer, Yorkshire and Humberside**



# 25 YEAR BADGES



*Terry Havenhand receives his 25 year badge from Paul Ahmed*



*Paul Smith receives his 25 year badge from Paul Ahmed*



*Chris Winckless receiving his 25yr badge from Graham Noakes, Act/Regional Secretary at Leigh-on-sea fire station, Essex*



*Phil Chapman, Gerwyn Howells, John Kinnersley, Dai Court, John Morgan, Eion McDougall, John Roberts, Richard Brock, Phil Bown, Brian Palmer and Ian Barnes all receive their 25 year badges*



*Stewart Kinnon presenting Eammon Daly Green watch Cowcaddens with his 25 year badge*



*Over 30 Firefighters received their 25 year badges at a special function held at the Waldorf Hotel in Manchester. Presenting the badges was Regional Treasurer Warren Gee*